THINKING OUT LOUD
MAY, 1991

During the past couple of months the City of Colorado Springs has been addressing the status of its Human Relations Commission and whether or not that commission should be given the power to intervene as requested in discriminatory employment practices.

Within the definitions of groups to be protected by the commission's mandate are people of homosexual orientation. This has occasioned a great deal of discussion in the public and has pointed to differences among Christian churches in their approach to homosexuality.

In view of this, it seemed to me that it might be helpful if I were to state the Roman Catholic position regarding the rights of persons with homosexual orientation. To this end I am now going to quote extensively from the American Bishops' recent pastoral letter entitled Human Sexuality: A Catholic Perspective for Education and Lifelong Learning.

"Mindful of the inherent and abiding dignity of every human person, we affirm what we wrote in 1976, namely that 'homosexual (persons), like everyone else, should not suffer from prejudice against their basic human rights. They have a right to respect, friendship, and justice. They should have an active role in the Christian community'. We echo strongly the Congregation for The Doctrine of The Faith, which, in a 1986 document stated, 'It is deplorable that homosexual persons have been and are the object of violent malice in speech or in action. Such treatment deserves condemnation from the Church's pastors wherever it occurs.'

We call on all Christians and citizens of good will to confront their own fears about homosexuality and to curb the humor and discrimination that offend homosexual persons. We understand that having a homosexual orientation brings with it enough anxiety, pain and issues related to self-acceptance without society adding additional prejudicial treatment.

However, we also want to express clearly the Church's teaching that 'homosexual (genital) activity, as distinguished from homosexual orientation, is morally wrong'. Such an orientation in itself, because not freely chosen, is not sinful. As we have stated several times in this document, we believe that it is only within a heterosexual marital relationship that genital sexual activity is morally acceptable. Only in marriage does sexual intercourse symbolize the Creator's dual design, as an act of covenant love, with the potential of co-creating new human life. Therefore, homosexual genital activity is considered immoral. Like heterosexual persons, homosexual

men and women are called to give witness to chastity, avoiding, with God's grace, behavior that is wrong for them, just as nonmarital sexual relations are wrong for heterosexual men or women."

Clearly, it is the teaching of the Bishops of our nation that discrimination against homosexual persons is inappropriate. This does not mean, however, that the Church binds her members to sympathizing with those who disagree with the Church's teaching, as outlined above, regarding acting out homosexual desires. For example, a parish would not be bound by Church interpretation to hire anyone who admittedly disagreed with that teaching.

All of this brings to light once more the Church's dual role as teacher of the ideal, as called for by the Gospel, and healer of the less-than-ideal, also called for by the Gospel. Constantly we must both state the truth of the goodness called for by our faith and also to live in compassionate understanding of one another's failures and difficulties.

I call on all pastors and others of our faith to work diligently with our homosexual brothers and sisters to form the loving and mutually supportive community we profess to be.